

MUSIC for the FUNERAL RITES

1. Music

Like weddings, funerals are not just private gatherings for the family, but, more importantly, are acts of worship involving the entire Church. Since the funeral liturgy is an expression of faith, it demands appropriate choices of music. This document specifically addresses the musical needs of the funeral Mass when the remains are present. However, similar attention should be given to funerals outside Mass, vigils, and the service at the graveside.

Three aspects to be considered:

Liturgical Judgment: Is the music's text, form, placement, and style appropriate to the funeral liturgy? Does it express our shared belief in Christ's Paschal Mystery and our hope of eternal life, while providing comfort and consolation to those who grieve?

Musical Judgment: Is the music of technical, aesthetic, and expressive value? Does it have enduring artistic integrity?

Pastoral Judgment: Is the music appropriate for these particular circumstances? Will it help the people gathered for this particular liturgy pray and express their faith in these difficult circumstances?

Other considerations : Secular music is **not acceptable** before, during, or after the rite within the sacred space. It should be reserved for the time of gathering at the funeral home or during the meal following the burial.

Recorded music is **not acceptable** within the liturgy and should never be allowed to replace the congregation, choir, organist, or other instrumentalists.

The music customarily used at the parish Sunday Eucharist is illustrative of the kind of music appropriate for the funeral rites in that parish. Lists of hymns suitable for the Order of Christian Funerals can also be found in most hymnals.

Music is integral to the funeral rites. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love. The texts of the songs chosen for a particular celebration should express the paschal mystery of the Lord's suffering, death, and triumph over death and should be related to the readings from Scripture. (Order of Christian Funerals 30)

2. The Funeral Liturgy

Funeral or Resurrection Choirs

Consolation may be described as “offering comfort in time of grief or distress.” The ministry of consolation calls for the church as a whole, and the parish in particular, to recognize its relationship to its members who have died, to hold them in loving memory and to assist the bereaved in dealing with their grief.

Many parishes have found it helpful to form choirs of retired parishioners or others who are at home (or available) on weekdays, whose unique ministry is to assist the grieving members of the funeral assembly by leading the sung prayer of the funeral liturgy. (LMT 32) Periodic practices, often immediately following a funeral liturgy, will give the choir an opportunity to broaden its repertoire, avoiding the tendency to limit themselves to singing the familiar “standards.”

An organist or other instrumentalist, a cantor, and, whenever possible, a choir should be present to assist the congregation in singing the songs, responses, and acclamations of the funeral liturgy. (Order of Christian Funerals 152)

Prelude

At the funeral liturgy the community gathers as the family and friends of the deceased to give praise and thanks to God for Christ’s victory over sin and death, to commend the deceased to God’s tender mercy and compassion, and to seek strength in the proclamation of the paschal mystery. (Order of Christian Funerals 129) *All music played or sung during this period should enable those gathered to remain in a state of prayer and ready themselves for the Mass.*

Introductory Rites

Greeting

Sprinkling with Holy Water

(Placing of the Pall)

Entrance Procession

To draw the community together in prayer at the beginning of the funeral liturgy, the procession should be accompanied, whenever possible, by the singing of the entrance song. This song should be a profound expression of belief in eternal life and the resurrection of the dead as well as a prayer of intercession for the deceased. (Order of Christian Funerals 135) *A well-known and easily singable piece in verse-refrain-verse-refrain form may be suitable for the procession, as this allows those entering the church to participate without printed music. If a hymn is desired, instrumental music should be used to accompany the procession, followed immediately by the Gathering Hymn.*

(Placing of Christian Symbols)

Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

Reading I

Responsorial Psalm

The responsorial psalm enables the community to respond in faith to the first reading. Through the psalms the community expresses its grief and praise, and acknowledges its creator and Redeemer as the sure source of trust and hope in times of trial. Since the responsorial psalm is a song, whenever possible, it should be sung... When not sung, the responsorial psalm after the reading should be recited in a manner conducive to meditation on the word of God. (Order of Christian Funeral 139)

Reading II

Gospel Acclamation

In the *Alleluia*, or gospel acclamation, the community welcomes the Lord who is about to speak to it. If the alleluia is not sung, it is omitted. (Order of Christian Funerals 140) *Special attention should be given to the selection of appropriate Gospel Acclamation Verses that can be found in the Order of Christian Funerals and the Lectionary. The musicians also need to be aware of the special circumstances that arise for funerals in the season of Lent.*

Homily

General Intercessions

Procession with the Gifts

The offertory song may accompany the procession and preparation of the gifts. It is not always necessary or desirable. Organ or instrumental music is also fitting at the time. When song is used, it need not speak of bread or wine or of offering. The proper function of this song is to accompany and celebrate the communal aspects of the procession. The text, therefore, can be any appropriate song of praise or of rejoicing in keeping with the season... Instrumental interludes can effectively accompany the procession and preparation of the gifts and thus keep this part of the Mass in proper perspective relative to the Eucharistic prayer which follows. (Music in Catholic Worship 71)

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Since music gives great solemnity to a ritual action, the singing of the people's parts of the Eucharistic Prayer should be encouraged, that is, the responses to the preface dialogue, the Sanctus (Holy, Holy), the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen. To reinforce and to express more fully the unity of the congregation during the communion rite, the people may sing the Lord's Prayer, the doxology, the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), and a song for the communion procession. (Order of Christian Funerals 144) The singing of a psalm or hymn of praise after the distribution of communion is optional. If the organ is played or the choir sings during the distribution of communion, a congregational song may well provide a fitting expression of oneness in the Eucharistic Lord. (Music in Catholic Worship 72) *However, the time of silence following the distribution of the Eucharist should not be disturbed by the insertion of unnecessary music, particularly solo singing.*

3. Final Commendation

Invitation to Prayer

Silence

Song of Farewell

Where this is customary, the body may be sprinkled with holy water and incensed... The sprinkling is a reminder that through baptism the person was marked for eternal life and the incensation signifies respect for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. The song of farewell, which should affirm hope and trust in the paschal mystery, is the climax of the rite of final commendation. It should be sung to a melody simple enough for all to sing. It may take the form of a responsory or even a hymn. When singing is not possible, invocations may be recited by the assembly. (Order of Christian Funerals 147)

Prayer of Commendation

4. Procession to the Place of Final Committal

Especially when accompanied with music and singing, the procession can help reinforce the bond of communion between the participants... Psalms, hymns, or liturgical songs may also be sung by the participants as they gather at the place of committal. (Order of Christian Funerals 149)

5. Music for Other Moments of Bereavement

Music has the power to console. Therefore, there may be other times when music would be a great benefit to those who are going through their bereavement. The vigil service is a time that music may help family and friends express their grief. Simple music while the family gathers during the closing of the casket and its transfer to the Church. The place of final rest is another place where music may reach out and console the family.

6. Music Selection

Singing of Ave Maria

Since *Ave Maria* is obviously Marian and not Eucharistic in nature, it is most successfully used during the Prelude. It is not appropriate for the Preparation, during Communion, or after Communion.

Below is a list of music that is appropriate for the funeral Mass. While this list is not comprehensive, it represents, in microcosm, a cross-section of styles and idioms that can be found in parishes throughout the Diocese of Columbus.

Entrance Procession

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus

*Be not Afraid

*Keep in Mind

I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say

*The Strife is O'er

Be Thou My Vision

*These selections have antiphons that can be sung by those gathered without the assistance of printed music.

Responsorial Psalm

The repertoire available for the Responsorial Psalm is so vast that resources are listed rather than specific titles. The Psalm text should take precedence over the selection of a favorite melody.

The parish's primary hymnal is the best place to start.

Respond and Acclaim

WLP publications

GIA: Guimont, Worship Psalter, Ritual Song

Gospel Acclamation

Mode VI Alleluia

Celtic Alleluia

Murray, OSB Alleluia

Appropriate selections from Respond and Acclaim

Glory to You, Word of God... or other appropriate Lenten Acclamations

Mass Settings

Mass of Creation (Marty Haugen)

Community Mass (Richard Proulx)

St. Louis Jesuit Mass

New Plainsong Mass (David Hurd)

Land of Rest Mass (Richard Proulx)

Communion Procession

I am the Bread of Life

Gift of Finest Wheat

Unless a Grain of Wheat

Eat This Bread

Setting of Psalm 34, 23, or other appropriate Psalm

Life-Giving Bread

Song of Farewell

Come to His/Her Aid (Old Hundredth)

Saints of God

Song of Farewell (Joncas)

Recession

Some setting of In Paradisum